

THE EUGENICS REVIEW

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"Eugenics is the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally."

NOTES OF THE QUARTER

IT will be recalled that the *Society* took the initiative in calling together the Population Investigation Committee of which Mr. A. M. Carr-Saunders is the Chairman and Dr. C. P. Blacker the Honorary Secretary. In the last three years, financial grants have been made by the Eugenics Society to the Investigation Committee which has its Headquarters in the *Society's* premises. The Investigation Committee has appointed a medical sub-committee, one of whose tasks has been the preparation of a questionnaire on fertility. Much time and care has been devoted to this document of which no less than nine drafts were prepared; a preliminary sample of 500 copies were, moreover, filled in and analysed.

On July 1st, the following letter was published in the *Lancet* and *British Medical Journal* wherein there also appeared editorial articles supporting the signatories' plea for co-operation from the medical profession:

PROBLEMS OF DECLINING FERTILITY

SIR,—We should be grateful if we might be allowed to draw the attention of your readers to an inquiry into the causes of infertility which is being promoted by the committee to which we belong. These causes have been much discussed of late in Parliament and elsewhere. It will be recalled that the main object of the Population Statistics Act, which came into effect on July 1st, 1938, was to throw further light upon this subject.

But there are strict limits to what we may learn from vital statistics. They can tell us nothing, for instance, about how many marriages are involuntarily sterile or sterile by design or of the extent to which abortion and contraception are practised, or about the numerous motives which restrict parenthood in different regional and occupational groups. These problems can only be clarified by direct inquiry.

A questionnaire has been prepared by our committee. If filled in on a large enough scale it will yield information which is otherwise unobtainable. It has been designed for the use of doctors, midwives, nurses and other competent investigators, and has been drawn up on the same general lines as were followed by Dr. Raymond Pearl in his comprehensive American inquiry. The Committee is anxious to obtain records of the attitudes and experiences of as large a sample as possible of married women in this country, irrespective of age and parity. It would therefore be very grateful if those of your readers who are interested in the problems of declining fertility, or in problems allied thereto, would assist it by sending for copies of its questionnaire and by filling them in when appropriate occasions present themselves.

An honorarium of 1s. per filled-in questionnaire is offered. A small manual has been prepared which provides guidance in the use of the questionnaire. Will those of your readers who are interested kindly communicate with the secretary of the committee?

We are, etc.,

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HENRY BRACKENBURY
HORDER
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Arrangements for dealing with the questionnaire have been established at the premises of the *Society*, where Miss Mary Best, the medical sub-committee's secretary, has a room. Fellows and Members in a position to fill in the questionnaire are invited to write to her, applying for copies. They will be furnished with a pamphlet of Instructions and Notes explaining in detail how the questionnaire should be used; and they will receive 1s. for each copy filled in.

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The Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Abortion was made public in June 1939. In our Statement of Aims and Objects, the Eugenics Society advocates "the provision of legalized facilities for voluntarily terminating pregnancy in cases of persons for whom sterilization is regarded as appropriate, and in cases of incest and rape." On April 12th, 1938, the *Society's* case was put before the Interdepartmental Committee by Lord Horder, Professor Sir Walter Langdon-Brown, Professor Edward Mapother and Dr. C. P. Blacker. A document explaining the *Society's* position had previously been communicated to the Interdepartmental Committee and is published at the end of these Notes.

From the standpoint of the *Society*, the chief point of interest in the Report is the fact that none of the *Society's* recommendations were endorsed in the Committee's main statement; all of them, however, were supported by a vigorous Minority Report of

which the only signatory was Mrs. Dorothy Thurtle, the wife of Mr. Ernest Thurtle, M.P. for Shoreditch, who is perhaps the most eloquent and consistent advocate of birth control in the House. A noteworthy finding of the Committee is the surprising smallness of the risk of death from criminal, therapeutic and spontaneous abortion, when the different rates are combined; deaths occur in about 0.35 per cent. of all abortions. The risk is thus little different from that attending a pregnancy which does not end in abortion. The danger of death, however, in cases of *criminal* abortion is estimated as about twice that following spontaneous and *therapeutic* abortion. If, therefore, the Committee had been mainly concerned with the preservation of life, it might appropriately have recommended that such facilities for terminating pregnancy as are available for "therapeutic" cases be sufficiently generalized to reduce the incidence of "criminal" abortions. But the purely medical aim of reducing maternal mortality and morbidity was not of first importance for the Committee. Demographic, sociological and moral considerations were also prominent in their minds. Indeed, so much weight was given to the last-named that the Committee refrained from advocating the course which might, it seems, have commended itself to common sense, namely, that adequate information on birth control be made available to all women who might want it. Birth-control methods, it is declared, are not always reliable; hence, women might be led to resort to them instead of practising sexual abstinence which the Committee seems to regard as the proper course.

Mrs. Thurtle's courageous Minority Statement mitigates an impression of hesitancy, conventionality and over-inhibition by ethical scruples which is given by the Majority Report. She states that if in other countries the presence of hereditary abnormalities, incest and rape are regarded as justifying the termination of pregnancy, she fails to see why adequate safeguards should not be devised to enable them to become operative in this country. But her suggestion that facilities for abortion should be made available for

women who have had four or more pregnancies, irrespective of their state of health, may provoke some dissent among persons who would support her other recommendations. It will be endorsed by those who feel strongly that women should have the right to decide whether or not they have children ; it will be opposed by persons who, influenced by the present demographic position, would hesitate to encourage the termination of pregnancy in a healthy woman.

If facilities for ending pregnancy, whether on eugenic or other grounds, be widened, it is imperative that adequate safeguards be devised to prevent abuses. An essential requisite must be that the operation of these safeguards should not involve long delay, for if the matter were unduly postponed the pregnancy would advance so far as to make termination dangerous. If, moreover, it were made lawful to terminate a pregnancy without any further safeguard than the approval of a single medical practitioner, there might well arise, within the ranks of the medical profession, a class of legalized abortionists. Even if authorization by any two independent medical practitioners were required, the same thing might happen. A possible solution of the difficulty might be found if the suggestion put forward on another page by Dr. C. P. Blacker were adopted. He recommends that there should be established, under local authorities, a service concerned with all aspects of family welfare. The consent of a responsible medical authority in such a department of family welfare, taken together with that of the woman's family doctor, should provide an adequate safeguard.

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Family allowances have been prominently discussed in recent months. A well-reasoned plea for these was put forward on June 21st by Lord Samuel in the House of Lords, who received support from Lord Dawson, Lord Derwent and the Archbishop of York. Lord Samuel, and those who came after him, urged the Government to set up a Royal Commission on Fertility ; but Lord Stamp, and later Lord Templemore, who spoke for the Government, pointed out that such a Commission would, as yet, have few data to

work upon. Its appointment would, it was urged, be more appropriate after the Population (Statistics) Act which came into effect on July 1st, 1938, had had time to furnish information ; we are, moreover, approaching the year of the decennial census. But it can be regarded as certain that at some time in the future a Royal Commission will be appointed. In calling together the Population Investigation Committee and in establishing, jointly with P.E.P., the Population Policies Committee, the Council of the *Society* has had prominently in mind the time when it will be asked to submit evidence before such a Royal Commission. The scheme of family allowances introduced by his family at Bournville was also discussed at a recent conference in Cambridge by Mr. Laurence Cadbury who is now Treasurer of the Population Investigation Committee. A preliminary enquiry as to how the allowances were spent on different family needs was regarded by him as yielding satisfactory results.

* * *

Viscount Dawson of Penn spoke at Welwyn Garden City on May 23rd on the decline in population. The net reproduction rate, he said, was at its peak in 1881 at 1.5 ; by 1925 it had fallen to 1.25, and in 1933 showed a grave decline to 0.76. He stressed the qualitative implications of this fall, showing that if the present trends continue youth and age will have reached equal numbers by 1962. The remedy is not a return to the high birth rate of Victorian times, with its accompanying high infant death rate, but the ideal of a family of four, wisely spaced, and wherever possible no family of less than three. Although, he said, this statement is based on the interests of racial survival and strength, it is surely equally sound from the point of view of the family. The completion of the maternal cycle at suitable intervals make for preservation of beauty of mind and body. Children make the home and keep their parents young while educating each other.

Birth control came into being as the result of social forces, not of evil intentions ; it exists in all civilized countries and is necessary and inevitable ; the mistake to-day is

its extension towards the point of suppressing births. Lord Dawson urged that failure to conceive should never be allowed to extend beyond a year without resort by both parties to medical advice; but he maintained that birth control accounted in the main for the present population shrinkage. If people once realize that "a population depends upon its quality and worth, that if a nation is to live and be strong, it must go on being born again by the steady reinforcement of new lives, they will see the necessity of adequate parenthood; and should they fail to contribute their share, the ageing part of the population will increase, pensioners will overtake producers, and the last state of unemployment will be worse than the first."

Reproduction should no longer be the exclusive responsibility of parents, but there should be an extension of such present social services as maternity welfare, free education and school meals. Professor Carr-Saunders has said that, before birth control was widely practised, children were an inevitable accompaniment of a fertile partnership; now the nation has to rely on voluntary contributions for its revenue of children. Should otherwise willing parents be penalized by financial stresses and poverty? Should not the State assist those of limited means by contributing to the attainment of effective nurture? Lord Dawson suggested weekly grants progressing with each child up to a given maximum, suitable housing accommodation with easy access to nurseries and crèches, linking up with the various schemes for physical recreation whose aim is to secure national fitness and welfare.

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Compared with ours, the demographic position of France has some peculiar features which have recently received widespread comment in our press. In 1935 the net reproduction rate of France was 0.87 as compared with 0.76 for England and Wales. The ultimate prospects of replacement were thus, at that time, better for France than for us. But the immediate position in France excites notice more than ours because the population of France has, in round numbers, already begun to decline. Indeed, a new family code

for France has recently been promised by Monsieur Daladier. This is reported as involving changes in the land tenure laws which are called for by an event which much alarms French demographers, namely the "flight from the land." This unfortunate movement has been encouraged by the French inheritance laws which require that, on the death of the owner, his property should be equally divided among his children. Last year, a decree was passed enabling small farms to remain undivided. But the anomaly remains that a son who stays on the farm with his father shares, on his death, the property with the son who goes to a town and holds a salaried post. This situation frequently results in all the sons leaving the farm, so that it is ultimately sold or abandoned. It is now proposed that the son who remains should earn, with every year's work on the farm, a right to a proportion of it over and above his normal share. The farm might therefore pass undivided to one of the farmer's sons.

It is also proposed that a measure comparable to the German system of marriage loans be adopted. These may be given on specially favourable terms to those staying on the land. It is, moreover, regarded as necessary that rural life should be made less difficult for women who, at present, bear a large share of its inconveniences. The system of family allowances which have been introduced on a very wide scale in France have been described by Mr. D. V. Glass in his book *The Struggle for Population*, a second and much fuller edition of which is now in course of preparation. There is little evidence to show that the scale of allowances hitherto paid in any part of France is sufficiently high to act as an incentive to increased fertility. It is now expected that the Government will either raise the family allowances or else try to provide other forms of relief for large families in the form of new social services.

The provisions of France's new family code will be watched with interest in this country. We will return to this subject again when full details are available of the code.

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We publish in this issue* a letter from Mr. Richard M. Titmuss of immediate topicality and importance. In it Mr. Titmuss discusses the results of the medical examinations of some 55,000 militiamen and in emphasizing the points he made in a letter to *The Times* on June 22nd draws attention to the wide divergence between the militia examination results and those for the Regular Army. The Government have, we understand, been pressed for an explanation but to date no authoritative answer has been forthcoming. The Minister of Labour, who is in charge of the examination arrangements, has not, we feel, been particularly helpful. When a case of a young man who had been passed for service although sightless in one eye was raised, Mr. Brown replied that Nelson was similarly handicapped. But the Minister apparently forgot that Nelson had the use of only one arm. We are thus led to presume that these irrelevancies cover a reluctance to explain the apparent contradiction in the figures. At this stage, therefore, we can but hazard our own explanation.

So far from the problem being impenetrable we are inclined to think that, after making due allowance for other factors, the explanation may after all be extremely simple. Taking the world situation as it is to-day one can well understand the Government wishing to present the nation's physique in a good light. Such a desire at such a time is of course quite normal in a government and in certain spheres it would claim our sympathy. But in this particular instance, on a matter of such fundamental importance as the public health, we can only express our regret at the way the examinations have been handled and the lost opportunities for ascertaining valuable data on the quality of such a large cross-section of the adult population. The facts, and they appear incontestable, seem to us to reveal a somewhat amateurish attempt at concealing the results of a rather prolonged bout of wish-thinking. As Mr. Titmuss pertinently remarks, when one proceeds to add to the 97 per cent. the number of men between the

ages of 20 and 21 already serving in the Defence Forces, the proportion "fit for military service" is raised to close on 99 per cent. Every doctor, social worker, and eugenicist knows by experience that such a figure is quite ridiculous, according to any reasonable standard of the requirements of military service.

The Government, it seems, have gone too far. They may, indeed we believe they do, claim that the nation is unitedly behind their present foreign policy. But when they allow their eagerness to advertise us as an A1 nation to outrun the true facts, then indeed they are treading on dangerous ground. The presentation of these militia figures in such a favourable light might do incalculable harm not only to the structure of our existing social services but might also blind us to the many gaps that have still to be closed in the provision of adequate health and medical services. If, as Mr. Hore-Belisha's speech in Paris seemed to suggest, the figures are an attempt to reply to the dictators' talk of decadence, then we can only reply that the practice of the art of self-deception does not in our view provide the best basis for an answer, if indeed an answer is necessary.

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The decision of the National Birth Control Association to change its name to the Family Planning Association is one which we warmly commend. The term birth control, though much to be preferred to the older "family limitation," is certainly misunderstood by some sections of the public and it is equally certain that this misunderstanding is fostered by propaganda emanating from sources opposed to all forms of contraception. The Family Planning Association is alive to the demographic position and is therefore concerned with the prevention and treatment of sub-fertility as well as the establishment of clinics where women can learn how to space, but not necessarily to limit their families.

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We publish elsewhere* in this issue a letter from Miss Pocock on the subject of eugenic propaganda. Fellows and Members who wish

to help her work in the *Society's* Propaganda Department can do so in a number of ways. Those in touch with Rotary Clubs, Townswomen's Guilds, Women's Institutes and Political Associations might urge these organizations to ask for lectures on "Heredity and Citizenship," "The Future of Our Population," "Voluntary Sterilization of the Unfit," or "Eugenics and Modern Life." Where Health Exhibitions are being arranged, the organizers could be told of the *Society's* exhibit, and informed that a demonstrator would be sent. The *Society* would co-operate in every way possible. Further, the Film could be introduced to schools and teachers' training colleges, Literary Societies and Public Libraries and the School Charts to education authorities in various localities. Drawing-room meetings are also a useful way of spreading information about the work of the *Society* and of getting new members.

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Inter-Departmental Committee on Abortion

Memorandum submitted on behalf of the *Eugenics Society* by Lord Horder, Sir Walter Langdon Brown, Prof. Edward Mapother and Dr. C. P. Blacker, in March 1938.

"We understand that the terms of reference of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Abortion are as follows :

'To enquire into the prevalence of abortion and the law relating thereto and to consider what steps can be taken, by more effective enforcement of the law or otherwise, to secure the reduction of maternal mortality and morbidity arising from this cause.'

"The memorandum which follows is concerned with certain steps, other than more effective enforcement of the law, which might be taken to secure the reduction of maternal mortality and morbidity arising from the practice of abortion.

"The procuring of an abortion is evidence of a strong reaction to an unwanted pregnancy. If the reaction is not a strong one, the mother will allow the pregnancy to go to term or will make a feeble attempt, usually unsuccessful, to terminate it.

"We have reasons—as yet unformulated in adequate figures—for thinking that, among feckless and stupid people, who are often found in the 'Social Problem Group,' a desire to limit fertility more often finds expression in the practice of abortion than in that of contraception. This is especially apt to happen when the parents are addicted to drink. Contraceptive precautions are then forgotten. We have been impressed with the number of cases in which large families occur to women of the working classes during periods when their husbands were drinking to excess.

"We do not think that women can to-day be coerced into having unwanted children. We should therefore like to see brought within the reach of all a simple, cheap, harmless and reliable method of spacing births.

"We do not consider that such a method has yet been proved to exist, though claims have been made, by persons who oppose—on moral grounds—the use of methods calling for chemical and mechanical appliances, that the above requirements are satisfied by the utilization of the so-called 'safe period.' Informed opinion has changed in the last twenty years as to when, in the monthly cycle, this period occurs. We think that this subject calls for further careful research, the results of which should be made known as they become established; for we recognize that apart from sexual abstinence which, we do not believe to be widely practicable in the intimacies of marriage over long periods, the use of the 'safe period' constitutes for a section of the community the only permissible method of regulating conception.

"Research with a view to discovering a simple, reliable, harmless and cheap method of contraception (by means of a chemical spermicide) has been in progress for ten years and has already yielded significant results. We think that these researches should be energetically pursued and that, if they achieve their end, the resulting product should be made widely available to those sections in the community which are willing to use it and most need it.

"We think that further use should be made of existing sources of information as to the

practice of abortion. We have, at present, no authoritative statistics as to the practice of abortion in different occupational groups and geographical areas in this country; nor as to the relation of the practice to the woman's parity; nor as to how many attempts to procure abortion are unsuccessfully made; nor as to the effect of such unsuccessful attempts on the woman's health or on the health of the child born despite these attempts. We are further ignorant as to the comparative effects of abortions which are self-induced and which are induced by others, either on the woman's health or on her subsequent fecundity. We think that more information on these subjects could be obtained from maternity centres, from gynæcological wards of hospitals, and from birth-control clinics. An attempt is being made to standardize a questionnaire for use in birth-control clinics which would yield this information. Relevant questions are also included in a questionnaire proposed by the Population Investigation Committee.

"Certain recommendations have been made by a Departmental Committee on Sterilization as to the categories of persons for whom facilities for voluntary sterilization should be made available on eugenic grounds. We associate ourselves with these recommendations. From the biological standpoint, we consider a sterilizing operation to be a more significant and drastic procedure than the termination of a pregnancy, in that the first measure destroys fecundity, while the second does not. We therefore think that facilities for the voluntary termination of a pregnancy should be made available for those persons specified by the above-mentioned Departmental Committee as being appropriate candidates for voluntary sterilization.

"We understand that, with a view to restricting the practice of abortion, the sug-

gestion has been made that cases of abortion should be made notifiable. We do not wish to express an opinion on the desirability of this procedure; but we would like to make an observation which we think has a bearing on it.

"Great advances have recently been made in the technique of diagnosis of early pregnancy; and research is also in progress upon the hormonal control of reproductive processes. We think that it is within the bounds of possibility that there may soon be discovered a method of terminating an early pregnancy by the injection of a hormone or other substance that would completely displace the crude and often harmful methods now in use. If such a method were proved to be effective, harmless and without effects on subsequent fecundity, we think that it would be widely used by the medical profession and difficult to maintain within the exclusive province of that profession. Coupled with the establishment of an efficient and widespread pregnancy-diagnosis service, it might result in the termination of large numbers of early pregnancies which could not easily be traced or made compulsorily notifiable.

"Lastly, we think that there should be coupled with the universal provision of the knowledge and of the means of regulating conception, the promotion of measures designed to encourage parenthood among responsible and healthy stocks. While desiring to abolish the unwanted child, we wish to increase the number of planned and wanted children. Measures which might be taken to raise fertility are now being considered in this country and abroad; these measures, whether economic or otherwise, will not be successful unless they are accompanied by a more general recognition than exists to-day of the responsibilities and duties of parenthood."
